

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 7/21/2024
Colossians 1:24-29 “Suffering With and For Christ”^{**1}
Series: Christ: The Object of It All

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Main Idea: If Christ is the object of it all in our lives, it will show up in our response to suffering. I will rejoice in suffering with and for Christ. How is that possible? As Paul explains in Colossians 1:24-29, we must grasp God’s purpose regarding three subjects.

- I. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God’s purpose for Christ (24).
 - A. In the plan of God, Christ suffered for us.
 - B. In the plan of God, Christ is made known through our suffering.
- II. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God’s purpose for the church (25-27).
 - A. God has made known a mystery in the church.
 1. It’s for all people groups.
 2. It’s the hope of glory.
 3. It’s the truth that Christ lives in all who know Him.
 - B. God is making known a mystery through the church.
 1. He uses people.
 2. He uses suffering.
- III. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God’s purpose for me (28-29).
 - A. My mission involves a message.
 1. I am not here to promote myself.
 2. I am here to proclaim Christ.
 - B. My mission involves a motivation.
 1. I am not merely seeking decisions for Christ.
 2. I am seeking to present people complete in Christ.
 - C. My mission involves a means.
 1. God expects me to work hard in ministry.
 2. God Himself provides the power for ministry.

Application: When Christ is the object of it all, it shows up in my response to suffering.

1. Am I thinking rightly?
2. Am I giving the people around me a good picture of the sufficiency of Christ?
3. Am I tapping daily into the means of strength that God alone can provide?

What’s involved in making Christ the object of it all? That’s the question we’ve been seeking to answer this summer by doing an exposition of a different key passage per week. We’ve learned from Jesus’ letter to the church in Laodicea in Revelation 3 that it involves opening the door to Christ. We learned from Paul’s reflections in Galatians 2:20 that it involves finding our identity in Christ. We learned from Jesus’ teaching in Luke 14 that it involves following Christ and hating family for Christ. We saw in Philippians 3 that making Christ the object of it all involves knowing Christ, and from John 15, abiding in Christ.

Today we’ll see that it involves *suffering*, specifically suffering with and for Christ. In the plan of God, Christ suffered for us. But also, in His plan, Christ is made known through the suffering of His people, specifically, through their *joyful* suffering.

Joyful suffering? Yes. It’s joyful suffering that captures the attention of the unregenerate. Remember Paul in the jail in Philippi? He’s *singing*, to the amazement of the other prisoners, and even the jailer, who moments later is on his knees repenting and believing in the One who made the singing possible.

There is a price to be paid for making Christ the object of it all in our lives. We’ll see why this is so, and why it’s worth it as we open today’s text in Colossians 1.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the message at WBC on 10/18/09.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:24-29

As a pastor I see people in the midst of their suffering quite often. I see it in the hospital, in the counseling room, after worship services when people open up to me about their pain, in homes, in phone calls, and more.

Quite frankly, whenever I see people in their suffering, I see the unveiled truth about the person, for suffering is a revealer. Suffering reveals what we truly believe about God, about life, about ourselves, about what's important to us, and a whole lot more.

The fact is, it's easy to say, "Yes, my life is all about Christ." But the reality will be shown by the way we respond to suffering. It's true. People whose lives are all about Christ react differently when suffering strikes than do people whose lives *aren't*.

In reality, self-absorbed people don't suffer well. Just ask any nurse who works on the hospital floor. Self-consumed people don't suffer well. In fact, suffering actually exposes whether it's Christ's agenda or our own that matters most to us.

This morning is part six in our current series, *Christ the Object of It All*. You may recall that in week one I told you about my garage. The garage is supposed to be a place that houses my car. That's what it's for, but unfortunately garages tend to accumulate all kinds of clutter, and before long, the clutter replaces the car!

One of the reasons God allows suffering to enter our lives is to "declutter the garage". Suffering invites, actually it *compels* us to take inventory of what's really important to us.

The fact of the matter is, if our lives are all about Christ, it will show up in our response to suffering. The Lord says I will rejoice in suffering. Sound strange? Let me give you some texts to support that statement.

Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. *Rejoice and be glad*, because great is your reward in heaven..."

James 1:2 "*Consider it pure joy*, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds."

1 Peter 1:6 "In this you *greatly rejoice*, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

But the text I want us to camp on this morning is one that begins with this staggering announcement, "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you." Those are Paul's words in Colossians 1:24. Sometimes we read our Bibles and gloss over statements that ought to stagger us. Like this one. *I rejoice in what was suffered for you.*

Now that's an incredible testimony. The apostle Paul said that he *rejoiced* in what he *suffered* for the Christians in the city of Colosse. Was he serious? My wife might say to our daughters, "I rejoice in what I got out of the suffering I went through for you," in reference to the childbirth and rearing process. But Paul takes it further. *I rejoice IN what was suffered for you.*

How can a person rejoice in suffering? How could Paul? How can you and I? Here's the answer. As Paul himself explains in Colossians 1:24-29, to rejoice in suffering, we must grasp God's purpose for three subjects.

I. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God's purpose for Christ (24).

Notice verse 24, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."

Paul's ability to rejoice in his suffering was linked to his understanding of God's purpose for the person of Jesus Christ. Paul saw his sufferings in light of Christ's sufferings. So answer this. What was God's purpose for His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ? Though Paul doesn't tell us explicitly in this verse, he does elsewhere and has two purposes in mind.

A. In the plan of God, Christ suffered for us. That's the point Paul made just three verses earlier in Colossians 1:21-22 (NIV), "Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death..."

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16)."

"God demonstrated His love for us in this, while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rom. 5:8)." It was God's plan that His Son should suffer and die for us. But that's not all. There's a sense in which the suffering hasn't ended.

B. In the plan of God, Christ is made known through our suffering. Paul says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

Did Paul just say that something is lacking with regard to Christ's suffering? Yes, he did. But wait. Wasn't Christ's suffering on the cross sufficient and complete? Didn't the Lord cry out from the tree, "It is finished"? Yes, He did, and yes, His suffering for sin is indeed over.

Then in what sense are Christ's afflictions still lacking? Think of it this way. The fact of Christ's atonement required suffering, but so does the knowledge of it. No more suffering is needed to secure man's salvation. But suffering is necessary to make man's salvation known. Whose suffering? Ours, His people.

Do you remember what Jesus told Paul at his conversion? He sent Ananias to him with this message in Acts 9:15-16, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he *must suffer for my name*."

Why did Paul have to suffer? To pay for his sins? No. To make known the name of the One who paid for His sins. That's what's still lacking with regard to Christ's sufferings, the suffering necessary to make the Savior known to those who have yet to believe in Him. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 1:5 "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." Did you catch that? Christ's sufferings flow over into our lives.

It's God's agenda to use suffering to save the lost. He used His Son's suffering to make salvation possible. He uses our suffering to make His Son's salvation known. Listen to how the *New Century Version* translates verse 24, "I am happy in my sufferings for you. There are things that Christ must still suffer through his body, the church. I am accepting, in my body, my part of these things that must be suffered."

Did you know that when you came to Christ you were responding to a call to suffer? Unfortunately, that part of the invitation is often left out these days. But for Paul it was standard equipment. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," was Paul's message according to Acts 14:22.

"Why would anyone respond to a call to suffer?" you ask. I'll let Paul answer that question. "Why did you choose a life of suffering, Paul?" Hear his answer in Romans 8:18, "I consider that *our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that*

will be revealed in us.” That’s why. The suffering won’t last, and the suffering can’t even begin to compare with what’s coming!

But Paul didn’t just tolerate suffering. He embraced it. In fact, he said he sought in Philippians 3:10-11, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.”

You say, “I don’t have that kind of perspective on suffering.” I don’t either far too often, but I want it. What can we do to get it? Let’s learn from Paul. Here’s where to begin. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God’s purpose for Christ, and specifically, God’s purpose for making Christ known.

One day about fifteen years ago, I noticed our dog, Maddie, was limping. Now that was a problem since our then five-year-old Boxer-mix loved activity (and I mean *loved* activity). Like fetching a ball for hours or retrieving a Frisbee as long as you want to throw it, and most of all, running with her master in his morning workout. I looked closely at her front paw and noticed the problem. She had ripped one of her front nails down to the quick.

“Her running days are on hold for awhile,” I thought. “She can’t even put her weight on that foot without grimacing in pain.”

But I was wrong. When Maddie saw me head outside for my next morning workout, she ignored her pain and ran down the road right beside me *on three legs*. The pain was still there, but her love for her master inspired her to endure the pain. In fact, it broke her heart when I stopped, took her back inside the house, and insisted she stay off that foot for the next week or so to allow it to heal.

It’s amazing what you can learn from God’s creatures, if you’ll just take note. Maddie taught me that you can endure a lot of pain if you’re living to please your master.

But that’s our problem, isn’t it? Far too often we are *not* living to please our Master. We are living to please *ourselves*. If we’re going to suffer well, we must settle this issue every day before our feet even hit the floor. *Christ is the object of it all*. Life is not about me and my comfort, but about Him, knowing Him, and making Him known to others.

II. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God’s purpose for the church (25-27).

Take another look at verse 24, specifically to answer the question, “For whose benefit did Paul say he suffered?” He said, “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, *for the sake of his body, which is the church.*”

That’s why Paul suffered, because he was gripped by God’s purpose for this amazing living organism called *the church*. The church, says Paul, is Christ’s body. The church, says Paul, is worth suffering for.

Paul knew something we tend to ignore, that Christ didn’t die merely to rescue individual sinners. Christ died to form saved sinners into an entity called *the church*.

This is critical, my friend. If we’re going to rejoice in suffering, we must be gripped by God’s amazing purpose for His church.

Listen to Paul’s passion for the church in verses 25-27 (ESV), “Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

I hope you love the church. I hope you're an active, supportive, functioning member of a local church. But what is about the church that makes it so special? There are many things, but let's focus on two of them that Paul highlights here.

A. God has made known a mystery in the church. Let's unpack what Paul says about the church in verses 25-27. First, he says, "I have become its servant (NIV; ESV says 'minister')." Who was Paul's master? "It was Christ," you say. That's true, but here he says he served the church. That's not a contradiction, for again, the church is Christ's body, so to serve the church for the glory of Christ is to serve Christ.

How did Paul become a minister of the church? Did he volunteer? Hardly. Remember Acts 9 and the road to Damascus? Paul was not looking to serve the church, but rather destroy it. Here he says he became its servant "by the commission God gave me."

Just think. The Sovereign Lord chose Paul for the task of serving in His church, just as He did you if you are His follower. When He saves a sinner, He grafts that person into His body, gives that person a spiritual endowment or gift, and then tailor makes a ministry for that person to accomplish.

What was Paul's ministry? He says he was commissioned by God "to present you [the believers living in the city of Colosse] the word of God in its fullness." Not everyone is called to be a preacher, but Paul was.

And what specific message did he preach from the word of God? He says he preached "the mystery" (26). We're not going to take time now to develop Paul's concept of "mystery" fully (check out Eph. 3, if interested), but suffice it to say he's not talking about mystery in the sense of *mysterious* (like a mystery novel). The term refers to something previously unknown that's now known. In fact, Paul specifically says in verse 26 that this mystery "has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints."

Two thousand years BC, God chose a man named Abram, and through that man formed a family, and then a nation called Israel. And He gave to that nation His Word, and a place for sacrifices, and a priesthood to offer those sacrifices. And so for century after century, if you wanted to be right with God you had to be a believing member of that nation (or at least approach God in dependence upon that nation).

But then, through that chosen nation, God sent into the world His chosen Son, who on a Roman cross died and then conquered death for sinners, but not just Jewish sinners, but sinners from *every* nation. And that's the mystery.

1. *It's for all people groups.*
2. *It's the hope of glory.*
3. *It's the truth that Christ lives in all who know Him.*

That's what verse 27 says, "To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles [lit. 'among the *ethnesin*,' that is, all the ethnic people groups of the world] the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

That's the mystery. If Christ is in you, then it doesn't matter what your skin color is, or what language you speak, or whether you eat rice, or borsch, or pasta. If Christ is in you, you're heading for glory, and if Christ is in you, you're part of His Body along with men and women, and boys and girls from every people group on this planet.

But that brings us to a second, related point. The truth is, not all the people groups have heard the mystery. How will they hear? Here's how. God has not only made a mystery known *in the church*, but right now He is doing so *through* the church.

B. God is making known a mystery through the church. How is He doing it?

1. *He uses people.* He commissioned me, says Paul. But not just me. *To them*, says verse 27 referring to the saints. *To them* (the saints) God has chosen to make known *among the Gentiles* the riches of this mystery. So God uses people. Once you come to know this mystery, you are accountable to make it known. But it's not just people He uses.

2. *He uses suffering.* In fact, put the two together. God uses *people* who are *suffering* to make the mystery known. Isn't that what Paul is saying? Why could he rejoice in what he was suffering? Was he a masochist? Did he just love pain? No. He embraced the suffering because He saw what God was accomplishing through it to make the mystery known.

Beloved, there are many personal benefits to suffering mentioned in the Bible. God uses suffering to mature us (James 1:3), to produce perseverance in us (Rom. 5:3), to teach us His Word (Ps. 119:67), and so much more. But He also uses suffering to accomplish things, not just *in us*, but also *through us*, namely to make the mystery known. It's true. Suffering, when it's embraced with joy, gives you a powerful platform from which you can make the mystery of Christ known to those yet in darkness.

Let me illustrate the point. Several years ago, I read a helpful book written by a hospice nurse, Deborah Howard, entitled, *Sunsets: Reflections for Life's Final Journey*. The author shares the following story about a man named Abe Caldwell who once was a well known, greatly loved trainer at a racetrack who had a severe stroke that left him comatose in a nursing home. Howard writes, "He couldn't move, was badly contracted, and had shrunk to nothing but skin and bones despite a feeding tube. He couldn't speak or acknowledge in any way that he understood what people said to him."

In time most people stopped coming to visit Mr. Caldwell. Even his wife was uncomfortable coming, as it hurt too much to see him that way. But there was one person who came faithfully, a young friend named Ruth who was like a daughter to Caldwell. Ruth would speak tenderly to him, comb his hair, and just sit with him. Ruth shared that Abe and his wife more or less raised her, and that when she was old enough Abe got her a job as a 'pony girl' at the track, a job she loved as the person who escorted racehorses from the paddock to the starting gate.

One night Ruth and Deborah (the hospice nurse) were all alone with Abe when the following conversation took place:

Ruth asked, "Why is this happening to someone as nice as Abe? Why does he have to suffer like this? Why doesn't God just take him on to be with Him?"

"I don't know, Ruth," I answered. "But I'm absolutely convinced that there are reasons. We're told in the Bible that all the days of our lives are numbered before even one of them comes to be. The bottom line is that he's still here because it's not his time yet."

"Well, for the first time in my life, I've actually been reading my Bible. I've been trying to find something in there that will help me understand why this is happening. I pray all the time that God will take him. I can't stand to see him like this."

"This is the first time you've prayed or read your Bible?"

“Well, I’ve prayed before. I was raised Catholic; so I never really had to read the Bible. But I’m certainly getting a lot out of it now. I’ve never felt closer to God. But I don’t understand why He’s leaving Abe here like this.”

I smiled at her. “Could one of the reasons be that this is what it took to draw you closer to God and to encourage you to start reading His Word and praying? You say you’ve never felt this close to God before. Could it be that you wouldn’t have this new closeness with Him if all this hadn’t happened?”

She opened her mouth in shock. “Oh, my! You’re probably right. If that’s the case, I’m so sorry Abe had to go through all this for my sake.”

“He didn’t Ruth. There are likely many reasons why this is happening. That may just be one of them. You know, God uses whatever He wants to draw His children to Him. Don’t waste this experience, Ruth. Even after this is over, I suggest you continue reading and praying and know that nothing you’ve ever done or ever will do will make you good enough to go to heaven.”

“Then what does?”

“Christ. Just Christ. You have to trust in *His* righteousness, not your own. If you are one of His children, you will believe He is your Lord and you’ll ask Him to forgive your sins and save you from hell. And He will.”

Tears were rolling down her cheeks now. Her bottom lip quivered as she whispered, “I do believe that.”

We prayed together, and then I gave her a hug. She smiled, “Even though I still don’t know all the answers, I do feel better now. I know there’s a purpose to all of this. It really is all in God’s hands, isn’t it?”

“Yes, Ruth. It really is.”

Abe died early the next morning.²

The point is this. When the Lord allows us to suffer, it’s because He intends to do some things *in* us and *through* us.

Is that your perspective on suffering? I’ll be honest. Much of the time I spent preparing this message I was battling a migraine, so I’m not being flippant with that question. Be honest. Do you *rejoice* in the suffering that the Sovereign Lord allows into your life? Far too often, I don’t. But I need to, and I want to, and grasping God’s purposes for the church will help me to.

A century ago J. C. Ryle had this to say, “Trials are intended to make us think—to wean us from the world—to send us to the Bible—to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing but sickness is far better if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy; but adversity is a greater one if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin.”³

When God allows me to suffer, He’s making that point quite clear, not just to me, but to those watching me. Pastor Doug Reed put it this way, “Suffering does not make us good. It leads us to the place where we find Christ as our good. It brings us to the end of ourselves that we might reach the beginning of God.”⁴

Which brings us to our third point. To rejoice in suffering, first I must grasp

² Deborah Howard, *Sunsets: Reflections for Life’s Final Journey*, p. 141-2.

³ J. C. Ryle, quote taken from Deborah Howard, *Sunsets: Reflections for Life’s Final Journey*, p. 140.

⁴ Doug Reed, quote taken from Deborah Howard, *Sunsets: Reflections for Life’s Final Journey*, p. 140.

God's purpose for Christ. It was God's plan that Christ suffer for us, and it is God's plan that Christ be made known through our suffering. Next, I must grasp God's purpose for the church. He's making a mystery known *in* the church and *through* the church, and specifically He's making it known through the suffering of His people. Now it's time to make it personal, as Paul did in verses 28-29.

III. To rejoice in suffering, I must grasp God's purpose for me (28-29).

Paul is very transparent in verses 28-29, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."⁵

I love this text. When it comes to a philosophy of ministry, these two verses are it for me, my mission statement. I'd love to preach a whole message on just these two verses (and have done so). But for now, I just want to hit the highlights. According to Paul, I have a God-given mission (and so do you), and it involves three things.

A. My God-given mission involves a message. "We proclaim him." Who is the 'him?' It's Christ. The previous verse ends stressing that the mystery is "Christ in you." We proclaim *him*. So I have a message to preach. What is it?

1. *I am not here to promote myself.* That's not what life's all about. Rather...

2. *I am here to proclaim Christ.* Christ is our message. Do you talk about Christ very much? It goes without saying that I haven't fulfilled my mission if all I do is talk about myself, but neither have I fulfilled it if I just talk about "God" or "family values" or "the good programs my church offers." Our message is *Christ*.

What's involved in proclaiming Christ? Paul uses two participles to tell us. Proclaiming Christ involves "admonishing" and "teaching". By definition, to admonish (*noutheteo*) means "to rebuke, to warn, to advise of consequences for wrong action." And to teach (*didasko*) means "to provide instruction, to give information so a person will know what he needs to believe and do."

It's what you parents do all day long with your toddlers. You advise of consequences for wrong action, and you give information so your kids will know what to believe and do. You admonish and you teach.

That's what Paul says he did as he proclaimed Christ. He warned people about what was coming, namely the judgment of God because of sin. And then He taught them how they could escape that judgment, through believing in the person God sent to take that judgment in their place.

That's what we're to do. Paul says *we* proclaim Him, referring initially to Timothy who co-authored this letter, but the Scriptures make it clear that all who know Christ are to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8).

And who specifically are we to admonish and teach? Everyone, says Paul. Literally, "every man," a phrase Paul repeats three times in this verse. We're to warn every man, teach every man, and seek to present every man perfect in Christ.

You say, "How do I get the opportunities to tell people about Christ?" There are lots of ways, but I want to focus on the one Paul's emphasizing in this passage. You get opportunities by *suffering well*.

⁵ NIV "We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

One day Paul got arrested in Philippi for a crime he didn't commit. The authorities beat him and ripped the hide off his back. How'd he respond? Read Acts 16:25. He sang songs to Jesus in the prison! The result? He led the jailer and his family to Christ.

On another day he got arrested in Jerusalem, again unjustly, and this time a mob just about tore him limb from limb. In fact, he spent the next four years or so incarcerated. The result? He told everyone he met, from Jerusalem to Rome, that he was in chains for Christ. In fact, he later testified that because of his chains, a lot of other Christians were emboldened to speak the word of God courageously (Phil. 1:14).

It's true. Suffering gives you the perfect platform from which to proclaim Christ. I think about our brother Nahum in his battle with cancer. And John who deals with constant pain, as do many others in our church family.

I recall Bob Litteral and his challenge of dealing with his wife's Alzheimer's. And of course, our sister, Nancy Rae, who lived over fifty years in a wheelchair as a quadriplegic.

I think of some of you who have adult children who are breaking your heart. And others who are suffering unjustly with caustic, non-believing spouses. Anybody can *say* that Christ is wonderful, but each of you are *showing* Christ's splendor by the way you rejoice in your sufferings.

But it's not just a message we've received. God has also given us a motivation.

B. My God-given mission involves a motivation. "So that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." The Greek *teleion* means "complete, finished, mature, full grown." That's what we're after.

1. *I am not merely seeking decisions for Christ.* The assignment is far bigger.

2. *I am seeking to present people complete in Christ.* I can't tell you how many times I return to this verse in my mind (that's why I urge you to memorize it)! When I'm trying to minister to someone who gets under my skin, I remember Paul's motivation and make it my own.

Don't just tolerate people. View them in light of this purpose statement. My goal is to present every person perfect in Christ, complete in Christ, spiritually mature in Christ. And if I'm going to facilitate that, I need to ask myself a question about each person God brings my way. *How can I be used today to help make this person more complete in Christ?*

That question will lead to some follow-up questions, like:

--Does this person know Christ? Being complete starts with salvation.

--Is this person growing in Christ, and if not, how can I help?

--Are there noticeable sin issues in this person's life, and if so, what can I do about it?

--Does this person have relationships that please Christ, and if not, can I be of help?

That's our calling, to present people complete in Christ. You say, "How could I ever do that?" Good question. Here's the answer...

C. My God-given mission involves a means. Verse 29—"To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me." Notice the balance...

1. *God expects me to work hard in ministry.* Paul says he labored and struggled, and we must do the same. Is ministry hard work? Yes. Is it overwhelming at times? Absolutely. Then how do we do it?

2. *God Himself provides the power for ministry.* Paul said *I labor...with all HIS energy which powerfully works in me.*

Let me be up front. You can't give other people what you don't have yourself. Do you want to see God work mightily through you in the lives of other people? Then you must allow the Lord to work mightily in your life first! You can't help them grow if you're not growing. You can't help them deal with sin issues if you're not dealing with your own. So let me give you a couple of practical suggestions:

- a. Guard your personal time with God. Search the Scriptures daily, and pray.
- b. Allow the Spirit of God to search your life as you finish every day. Pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

Alright, we've learned this morning that if we're going to rejoice in suffering, we need to grasp God's purpose for Christ, for His church, and for us. Now it's time to take inventory. Ask yourself this critical question.

Take Inventory: Am I pleasing God in my response to suffering?

Perhaps it's your own suffering, or maybe the suffering of someone you love. Are you pleasing God in response to that suffering? Let's break that question apart...

1. *Am I thinking rightly?* Paul saw his own suffering as a platform for knowing Christ better and for making Christ known. Is that how you've been thinking?
2. *Am I giving the people around me a good picture of the sufficiency of Christ?* That's what we do when we *rejoice* in our suffering. That's what we could be doing if we would learn to rejoice in our suffering. And for that to happen...
3. *Am I tapping daily into the means of strength that God alone can provide?* He provides the power, but I must tap into that power, and do it every day.

Closing Song: #97 "*All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*" (all four verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Next week: "*Resembling Christ*" Romans 8:28-29